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Urban planning and quality of life: A review of pathways linking the built environment to subjective well-being

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Discussion Research ID	DPR-2026-1480
Year	2021
Field	Social Sciences
DOI	10.1016/j.cities.2021.103229
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Licence	CC-BY
Original source	Cities
Permanent link	https://discussionpublishers.com/research/80e21048-a750-4987-b2fc-66cb3eec4617
Publisher	Discussion Publishers discussionpublishers.com

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Cite as: Kostas Mouratidis (2021). Urban planning and quality of life: A review of pa. Discussion Publishers, DPR-2026-1480.

Abstract

In light of the rapid global urbanization, providing a better quality of life in cities is becoming an increasingly critical issue for urban planning. However, the links between the built environment and subjective well-being are not sufficiently understood. This paper reviews the evidence on the range of pathways linking the built environment to subjective well-being. Seven potential pathways are identified and reviewed: (1) travel, (2) leisure, (3) work, (4) social relationships, (5) residential well-being, (6) emotional responses, and (7) health. Based on this knowledge, the paper presents an overview of strategies for improving subjective well-being through urban planning. Among others, proposed strategies are to: enhance conditions for active travel; improve public transport while restricting cars; provide easy access to facilities and services; develop or steer technology and emerging mobility options to improve inclusiveness and quality of life for different groups; integrate various forms of urban nature as much as possible; provide accessible, inclusive public spaces and communal spaces; maintain upkeep and order in urban space, vegetation, and transport systems; implement noise reduction strategies; develop aesthetically pleasing buildings and public spaces based on residents' needs and preferences; and reduce socio-spatial inequalities while providing support for housing and transport for vulnerable groups.

Keywords: urban planning, quality of life, subjective well-being, built environment, active travel, public tra

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Original record: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2021.103229
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